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LOOTING DURING URBAN RIOTS VIEWED IN DIFFERENT LIGHT BY TWO OHIO SOCIOLOGISTS

BEVERLY HILLS: Current criticisms citing riots and looting in the nation's cities as the "breakdown of law and order" and "anti-social" behavior, if generally accepted by policy-makers, could result in wide-scale class-conflict within the U.S. which would make today's outbreaks of violence seem minor by comparison. This view is expressed by E. L. QUARANTELLI and RUSSEL R. DYNES, in a recent study, "Looting in Civil Disorders: An Index of Social Change."

The study, attacking the basis of some criticisms of the Kerner Commission Report, was published recently in a special urban violence issue of The AMERICAN BEHAVIORAL SCIENTIST, a research-oriented journal in the social sciences. The authors, both professors of sociology, and Co-directors of the Disaster Research Center at Ohio State University, suggest in their article that the spiraling outbreaks of looting are indicative of the end of a particular era of accommodation between the American Negro and whites. "In effect the plundering and looting increasingly signal the end of a period of time when existing 'rights' in a community will be automatically accepted by a significant proportion of Negroes there as being given," they say.

The failure of the police in a community to prevent looting can be seen as marking the end of that era, they write. "The psychological controls which really are the bases of police control in a community no longer suffice. The sheer power of National Guard or regular military units, when disorders reach a peak, is the only formal control left to communities."

Given any foreseeable combination of circumstances, military forces will prevail. If no other solutions are found, the pattern itself (of negro looting) may become routine across more and more American communities. If that is the case, instead of being an index of social change, the looting that has increasingly appeared in recent civil disorders may establish itself as a major structural device for change in the American social system," the authors warn.

They see the possible spread of this concept to the entire broad middle-class lower-class consensus about property rights. "If the more immediate problem [of negro looting] is not solved," they warn, "the development of such an open-class conflict" would make Americans look back with nostalgia upon the current racial conflict as a relatively painless confrontation in comparison to all-out class warfare.

Both authors are involved in research on organizational and community response to disasters and civil disturbances. Professor Quarantelli, recently published "Operational Problems of Organizations in Disasters" in the Proceedings of the System Development Corporation Symposium on Emergency Operations. Professor Dynes is author of Organizational Behavior in Disaster: Analysis and Conceptualization (forthcoming).

The ABS issue is available from Sage Publications, Inc., 275 South Beverly Drive, Beverly Hills, California 90212. The price is \$3.50 for a single copy (quantity discounts available for educational and bulk orders).